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Bassett Unified explores slashing adult school budget in half

By J.D. Velasco, Staff Writer

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A budget proposal for Bassett Unified that includes massive cuts to the district's adult school was met with widespread disapproval at a community meeting at Torch Middle School Tuesday night.

The district is facing a \$4 million deficit for the 2011-12 school year, and administrators hope to balance the budget, in part, by taking \$2 million from Bassett Adult School.

That \$2 million cut would amount to reducing the adult school's budget by half.

Superintendent Marty Galindo said he was reluctant to make such drastic cuts, but said he had little choice.

"I'm not going to tell you these are solutions we want to do, but I am going to tell you we need to find \$4 million," he said.

While many school districts across the state are facing budget problems because of reduced state funding, Bassett Unified is also feeling the pinch of declining student enrollment.

Between 2000-01 and 2010-11, enrollment dropped by 25 percent, from 6,028 students to 4,527, Galindo said.

With the district receiving about \$5,000 per year for each student, that decline means a loss of approximately \$7.5 million per year in funding.

The district is also considering a number of other

cost-cutting measures, including reducing salaries, implementing layoffs and furloughs, and shortening the school year. Officials are also considering giving up grants for arts, music and library improvements in order to save the matching funds

typically required for to receive such grants.

Most audience members at Tuesday's meeting seemed unwilling to accept cuts as a solution to the district's financial woes.

During the public comment portion of the meeting, many spoke of the positive impact the adult school has had on their lives.

Some carried colorful signs with slogans such as "Save adult education," "Don't close the adult school" and "Save Bassett adult education."

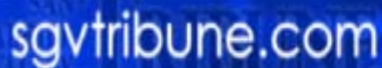
One man who lost his job two years ago said he's been attending the adult school to retrain himself in a different field.

"I am still looking for work, but now I feel I have more to offer employers than I did nine months ago," he said.

Dennis Arnold, a 47-year-old student in the solar power technology program, told

A promotional advertisement for ProFlowers. It features two bouquets: one with pink roses in a white vase and another with yellow and purple flowers in a glass vase. The text reads: "Send flowers for any occasion Bouquets from \$19.99 +s/h". Below this, it says "ProFlowers" and "Offer ONLY available at: proflowers.com/happy or call 1.877.804.1133".

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administrators to consider the impact cutting the adult school would have on the surrounding community.

"These are people here at Bassett Adult School who want to work," he said. "If you snatch the rug out from under them at this point, you're not only killing their dreams, you're hurting yourselves."

Arnold was one of several speakers who offered their own suggestions about how the district could cut costs or raise funding. He said administrators should seek out community volunteers to help with operations.

"I don't have \$2 million, but I have two hands," he said. "I can paint a building."

Jesus Sierra, a 34-year-old student in the heating, ventilation and air conditioning program, said the district could consider sponsorship deals for some courses. Arnold chimed in and suggested "Sears Home Appliance Repair."

Lew McCammon, a former Los Angeles Unified administrator whose wife attends computer classes at the adult school, said administrators should put pressure on state legislators to stop the cuts.

He also said he supports Gov. Jerry Brown's plan to eliminate redevelopment agencies, which he said funnel money away from schools, police and fire departments.

Others suggested charging people to park in school parking lots during weekend soccer games or for the nearby Vineland Swap Meet.

Galindo will present the budget proposal and audience suggestions to the school board at its meeting tonight at Edgewood Academy, 14135 Fairgrove Ave. in La Puente. The open session will begin at 6 p.m. and the superintendent's report will be given afterward.

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